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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 RABAT 002295

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DEPT FOR NEA/MAG, R AND P

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TAGS: [MO](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [KMPI](#)

SUBJECT: MOROCCO: COMBATTING EXTREMISM

REF: STATE 159129

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas T. Riley for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Combatting extremism is not a new priority in Morocco, but it has taken on new urgency in the aftermath of the suicide bombings on May 16, 2003 in Casablanca and the March 11, 2004 subway attacks in Madrid, acts of international terrorism in which Moroccans -- whether sons of the soil or emigrants -- were apparently involved. As commander of the faithful, as well as head of state, King Mohammed is the pivotal figure in the Moroccan battle against extremism, and in our view he is likely to continue to provide strong leadership in promoting democratic reforms which open the political space and dilute the appeal of extremism. GOM efforts to combat extremism focus on eliminating the economic conditions that foster exclusion and despair while also seeking to enhance law enforcement, bolster human rights practices and promote religious tolerance. USG efforts seek to strengthen Moroccan law enforcement capacity and build international law enforcement cooperation, create economic opportunities for youth, promote reform, and foster interreligious dialogue. Both countries must sustain their efforts in the long-run if extremism is to be effectively countered in Morocco. End summary.

Extremism in Morocco

12. (C) The struggle against extremism in Morocco took on new urgency following the 2003 Casablanca suicide bombings. Since then, Morocco has achieved a number of important successes in stopping terrorist acts from taking place. Despite these successes, however, both the GOM and the mission remain concerned about the activity of terrorist groups such as cells under the inspiration of the Salafiya Jihadiya. Some Islamists, including Justice and Charity organization members, charge that the Moroccan government policy of attracting Wahhabists to Morocco during the 1980s as a counterweight to the Moroccan left has fostered a more extremist atmosphere, which the GOM is now forced to confront.

13. (SBU) Within this context, poverty and the absence of economic opportunity for a young society fuel discontent, illegal emigration and the risk of instability. Migration of the rural poor to urban centers has created a pool of disaffected citizens who have few productive outlets and are vulnerable to the extremist message. The education system is largely unresponsive to the skills needed in the economy and

does not equip youth with the knowledge necessary for full, productive and participatory citizenship.

#### USG Efforts to Combat Extremism

14. (C) The mission believes that an approach of attacking root causes -- particularly lack of hope among urban youth brought on by joblessness -- is essential to a long-term strategy of fighting extremism in Morocco. While the GOM recognizes the need for action, its resources are limited. Thus our assistance efforts, buttressed by those from European allies, are key components of winning the war on extremism in Morocco.

#### USAID Activities: Promoting Opportunities for Youth

15. (SBU) The USAID strategy was put in place to address the challenges and adverse impacts of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and to help Moroccans seize the opportunities presented by the agreement. By their very nature, most USAID activities in Morocco help counter extremism by providing youth with hope for the future through education, jobs, and opportunities for democratic participation. USAID's recently launched five-year assistance strategy, in addition to supporting the FTA, seeks to address root causes of extremism by focusing on economic growth (including job creation and business development), education (with a focus on the quality of basic education and training for jobs), and democracy and governance (improved government responsiveness to citizen's needs).

16. (SBU) Economic Growth Activities: To address the widespread unemployment among Moroccan youth, one of the

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chief economic factors behind extremism, USAID seeks to improve training opportunities for Moroccan youth and increase their access to quality and relevant basic education. By improving the quality of the workforce and the relevance of workers' skills to the changing demands of business, USAID programs will also address the issue of extensive rural-to-urban migration. Economic growth will help increase job opportunities in both the rural and urban sectors, and reduce the rural exodus. Reflecting the Moroccan perspective, GOM Palace Advisor for Religious Affairs Jirari has emphasized to us that creating jobs for youth is the real key to curing Morocco's extremist issues.

17. (SBU) Education/Vocational Training Activities: By increasing women's literacy and girls' enrollment in schools and linking the quality and relevance of education with vocational training, USAID's programs will reinforce critical thinking skills and other related skills amongst youth, ultimately making them more competitive for the job market, especially in areas of opportunity brought about by the FTA (e.g., agriculture). These programs also serve to combat unemployment and underemployment.

18. (SBU) Democracy/Governance Activities: USAID DG activities seek to improve the efficiency of democratic institutions, including Parliament, and to develop government structures more responsive to citizens' concerns. Other DG activities will improve women's knowledge of their rights, ultimately enhancing their capacity to confront extremist views, and providing those dissatisfied with conditions in Morocco an avenue to affect peaceful change.

19. (SBU) Civil Society and Youth: USAID will soon launch civil society and youth assessments to determine the best means for working with the growing NGO and burgeoning youth populations in Morocco. Local civil society organizations can be powerful agents in defusing extremism, and many are eager for greater contact with and support from the US. Programs for disenfranchised youth can bring hope as well as serve as an antidote to despair. Currently, USAID does not have funds budgeted for either a civil society or a youth

program, but is putting in place designs in the event funding becomes available for these programs which are directly related to fighting the root causes of extremism.

#### Public Affairs Activities Target Youth, Islamists

10. (SBU) Enhancing cultural and religious exchange and dialogue is an important means for combatting extremist ideologies. PAS programming has focused on engaging youth, particularly from depressed areas, and Islamist experts and scholars, and in promoting English-language training.

11. (SBU) Speaker Programs: Through its speaker program, PAS has invited American imams (most recently Bashar Arafat of Baltimore in early 2005), for discussions with students and scholars on religion and religious extremism. In 2004, the mission sponsored Imam Yahya Hendi, Muslim Chaplain at Georgetown University. Both of these visits allowed the Mission to reach a different type of audience of religious leaders, officials at the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, theology students and experts, as well as the general public, with the subsidiary effect of demonstrating US support for religious tolerance and respect for Islam.

12. (SBU) English ACCESS Scholarship Program: Created in response to the May 2003 terrorist bombings in Casablanca, this initiative for underprivileged youth in Muslim communities provides English language classes to at-risk youth otherwise unable to afford them. Ninety-six male and female students took the classes in Casablanca in 2005 and the number will increase to nearly 600 Morocco-wide by the end of October. Embassy also sponsored 103 youth to attend two-week English-language summer camps taught by Peace Corps volunteers.

13. (SBU) International Visitor Programs: Four experts in Islam recently participated in an International Visitor Program entitled "Promoting Religious Dialogue." Two of these participants are TV journalists who produce religious programs, and one is a member of the Supreme Council of Oulemas. A university professor participated in a program on

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U.S. foreign policy and combating terrorism. Another university professor participated in a program on religion in the U.S., Islam, and the inter-faith dialogue. At an iftar hosted by the Ambassador in October 2005, the IVLP participants raved about their experience in the "Islamic" U.S. (noting that the U.S. adheres to the "Islamic values" of tolerance, the importance of family, and piety very closely).

14. (SBU) Four student leaders who are active in their community promoting civic education and tolerance (and all from underprivileged backgrounds) participated in an IVLP on how young leaders can bring social change and promote civic responsibility. As the IVL program generally highlights the tolerant and multi-ethnic nature of American society, it is fair to say that all of the 46 IV grantees sent in fiscal year 2005 were able to observe first-hand Islam in America. Through the IEARN student exchange, four American and four Moroccan high school students participated in an exchange in each other's country. MEPI sponsored a study program of the U.S. for three university student leaders and one high school student from underprivileged backgrounds.

15. (SBU) Cultural Events: During the month of Ramadan, the Ambassador hosted iftars for Islamic experts and youth, both warmly welcomed and widely covered in the local press. These simple, yet effective events resounded with both the participants and in the press as a gesture towards enhanced cross-cultural dialogue and understanding. A number of other mission-sponsored cultural programs and activities targeting Moroccan youth were held throughout the year, most notably a pioneering three-city Hip Hop Festival in May.

## Economic Opportunities Focus on Job Creation

¶16. (SBU) Morocco has ratified a Free Trade Agreement with the U.S., which is establishing an open market and removing trade barriers while improving the business climate and bolstering adherence to labor codes. Investment attracted to Morocco as a result of the FTA will ultimately create employment for Moroccans. Increased market access, including generous textile market access provisions, will also allow for employment creation. Through MEPI, the USG has invested over 10 million dollars to assist with implementation of the FTA. In 2004, Morocco qualified for the Millennium Challenge Account development program based on its progress in governing justly, investing in its citizens and ensuring economic freedom. Morocco's MCA compact could be worth more than one-half billion dollars. MCA will help finance the rural development portions of King Mohammed VI's USD 2.2 billion Human Development Initiative. Morocco's MCA compact will include income generating activities for rural dwellers, slowing the migration to urban slums that are the incubators for extremism. The USG is currently in the final stages of negotiating a Bilateral Science and Technology Agreement that will promote academic exchanges, joint research and educational opportunities in the sciences.

## Security Programs Emphasize Community Policing, Engaging Youth

¶17. (SBU) Another USG initiative is the community policing program funded by INL. The idea of introducing a community policing program evolved after the Casablanca bombings as the suicide bombers had been recruited from the poorer neighborhoods of Casablanca. The investigation into the bombing identified the mistrust among the poor with the Moroccan security authorities. This ultimately resulted in little information coming to the attention of authorities when extremists were preaching radical Islam and recruiting the would-be suicide bombers. In an effort to counteract this deficiency, Moroccan police became interested in creating a more favorable image of police in the poorer areas of Moroccan cities. They have begun their own concept of community policing (police proximite) and have expressed interest in complementing that program with a U.S. style community policing strategy. Senior Moroccan officials have traveled to the U.S. and been exposed to U.S. community policing methodology. ICITAP/DOJ (funded by State INL, \$500,000) recently visited Morocco to discuss various programs and as a result, we expect to introduce concepts such as developing youth sports leagues organized by police, and

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bicycle patrols, as well as utilizing NGO,s and Community leaders to help establish a law enforcement apparatus on a foundation of human rights and human dignity. The GOM has also created a police magazine, now found on newsstands, which promotes a positive image of the police force.

## GOM Efforts to Combat Extremism Focus on Development, Human Rights, Religious Tolerance

¶18. (C) Since the Casablanca bombings, the GOM has undertaken numerous reforms seeking to address the root causes of extremism, most recently announcing a major development program to address the issues of housing, unemployment and education (the National Human Development Initiative). In the meantime, efforts to improve the general state of human rights and to promulgate a more tolerant religious message are having an impact. All of these efforts form an important part of King Mohammed's vision for countering susceptibility to extremist ideology, particularly amongst Morocco's poor.

¶19. (C) Immediately following the bombings, the GOM arrested several thousand people, prosecuted approximately 1200 and has sentenced about 900 for various terrorism-related crimes. The Minister of Justice announced that these arrests

represent approximately 90 percent of those sought by the GOM. In response to the bombings, Morocco also passed tougher anti-terrorism laws which have resulted in an increase in the number of arrests and convictions for terrorist-related activities. In addition to its close cooperation with the U.S., the GOM has significantly increased international law enforcement cooperation with such countries as Spain, Italy and France.

¶20. (SBU) Human Rights: Under King Mohammed, the GOM has made important strides in several areas. Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission made progress in 2004 airing the history of disappearances and arbitrary arrest during the period lasting from the early 1970s until the mid 1990s. The GOM began implementing landmark reforms to the family code, aimed at strengthening the legal rights of women and children. In December 2004, the GOM and the USG co-hosted the first Forum for the Future that brought together ministers from BMENA nations with their G-8 counterparts to discuss democratic, economic, and social reforms in the region. Civil society and human rights representatives participated in this event. Morocco hosted the follow-on Democracy Assistance Dialogue in Rabat in October 2005 and fielded a strong delegation of NGOs, political parties, and government representatives.

¶21. (SBU) Religious Affairs: King Mohammed's sweeping reforms to the religious sector, as announced in April 2004, are intended to have a broad effect on society by promoting a more moderate and peaceful Islam and ultimately push extremism to the margins. As a result, the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs (MOIA) launched an aggressive program to counter extremist ideology within the madrasas and the mosques. The reorganization of the Ministry into a "traditional education" section and a "mosque division" is intended to give the government greater oversight over Islamic teaching and preaching throughout the country. Traditional education is responsible for modernizing Islamic education, safeguarding the Koranic school system from misuse and fostering open attitudes towards other cultures. The mosque division is responsible for ensuring that mosques are managed and financed in a transparent manner.

¶22. (SBU) A rigorous 12-month training program launched in April 2005 for 160 imams and 60 female advisors will ensure that well-rounded imams are educated to serve in Morocco's mosques. These new trainees will ultimately replace retiring imams throughout the country. The Ministry also initiated brief "refresher" sessions for preachers already in the field in an attempt to shape mentalities of the older generation. The Ministry has also organized training sessions for other religious workers in order to unify curriculum and provide training on the "modern era." To improve working conditions for imams, the Ministry recently announced a 30 percent salary increase (from approximately USD 800 annually to USD 1200 annually).

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¶23. (SBU) Spreading a message of tolerance and openness, the MOIA launched "Radio Quran," currently broadcast throughout Morocco, and continues to work on a website to which citizens can turn with questions on Islamic affairs. A telephonic "hotline" currently exists to handle religious inquiries. Established in 2004, the Ulema (religious scholar) Council and regional councils are intended to, among other tasks, receive complaints concerning rogue imams as well as coordinate on fatwas and religious teachings. At the same time, seventy MOIA delegates have been sent to various regions to "represent" the Ministry in religious matters. The series of annual Ramadan lectures sponsored by the King were originally established to reinforce the distinct, tolerant brand of Moroccan Islam (in 2004 a woman gave a Ramadan lecture for the first time). A draft law would give the Ministry increased control over the construction and financing of mosques in an attempt to get a better reign over



renegade preachers and their sources of funding. Several Moroccan TV stations, including a new Koranic TV channel, can now be seen internationally via satellite.

124. (SBU) In addition to specific MOIA programs, Morocco has cultivated a tolerant religious atmosphere for all faiths. Last year, the city of Marrakech hosted a Christian rock concert, featuring seven international bands, attended by an estimated 100,000 Moroccans over a three-day period. In 2004, Morocco also hosted the first working meeting of the Permanent Judeo-Muslim Committee to promote interfaith dialogue, despite concerns of extremist reactions.

What Works?

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125. (C) Our efforts to combat extremist thought in Morocco must necessarily be long-term and sustained if they are to be successful. The programs currently undertaken by post strive to address the root causes of extremism by providing hope to disenfranchised, unemployed youth, by encouraging inter-religious dialogue, and by encouraging GOM responsiveness (whether by police or elected officials) to the citizenry. The Moroccan leadership understands the stakes and is also doing its utmost to combat extremism, but continued political and financial support from Europe and the US will be essential to winning the battle long-term.  
RILEY